



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Jeff Duncan (R-SC)
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Threat to the Homeland: Iran’s Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere”

July 9, 2013

Remarks as Prepared

Iran’s perpetual defiance of U.S. and international sanctions, coupled with its propensity for sponsoring international terrorism worldwide, constitutes a recipe for instability and a threat to the security of the U.S. homeland. For years, Iran has been testing Western patience with its subversive actions. In the last two years, Iran’s brazen attempted attacks in Azerbaijan, India, Thailand, Georgia, Kenya, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and a foiled plot in Washington, DC demonstrate an audacity that we should find chilling. Today, Iran employs the capability to mobilize its global network of Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Qods Force, and Hezbollah operatives to further its objectives and threaten U.S. interests and security.

It is concerning to me that even though Iran has publicly stated that “the promotion of all-out cooperation with Latin America countries” is one of its “top priorities,” and “among the definite and strategic policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” this Administration refuses to see Iran’s presence – so near U.S. borders – as a threat to U.S. security. Last month, the State Department released a report in response to legislation that I authored on the threat to the U.S. from Iran. The unclassified summary found “Iranian influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is waning.” We know that there is not consensus on this issue, but I seriously question the Administration’s judgment to downplay the seriousness of Iran’s presence here at home.

Congress has focused extensively on activities of both Iran and Hezbollah in the region. Several House and Senate hearings have been held, Members of Congress have traveled to the region to investigate for ourselves if reports of Iranian activity in Latin America were true, this Subcommittee released a report outlining the findings from our investigation, and both Houses of Congress passed bipartisan legislation highlighting our concerns.

This Administration produced a report that neglected the input of our foreign allies in the region, and it did not meet the intent of my legislation to address this threat from Iran in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Further, the report did not consider all the facts by disregarding the recent findings from the General Prosecutor of the 1994 Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) Case, Mr. Alberto Nisman's investigation. In stark contrast to the State Department's assessment, Nisman's investigation revealed that Iran has infiltrated for decades large regions of Latin America through the establishment of clandestine intelligence stations and is ready to exploit its position to "execute terrorist attacks when the Iranian regime decides to do so."

Mr. Nisman was invited to share the findings from his 2006 and 2013 investigations into the AMIA bombings with this Subcommittee. The decision by the Government of Argentina to deny Mr. Nisman permission to testify at today's hearing on the grounds that this hearing "has no relation to the official mission of the General Attorney's Office," is deeply troubling and grossly inaccurate. Mr. Nisman sent a copy of his findings to the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. has a vital interest in learning more about Iran's operations within this hemisphere.

Mr. Nisman's investigation found that Iran was the "main sponsor" of an attempted attack on American soil in 2007 to blow up the John F. Kennedy airport in Queens, New York. Had the plot not been uncovered, an untold number of Americans could have been killed by this terrorist act. If the Administration continues to hold that Iran's influence is "waning," it needs to provide a clear justification for its analysis. Wearing blinders to the Iranian threat will not make it go away.

Consider the direct threat to the U.S. homeland from Iran's presence in the region. The GAO found in 2011 that DHS only had 40% of our Southern border under operational control, and only 2% of the Northern border was considered secure. DHS has never put forth a comprehensive plan to gain and maintain operational control of U.S. borders. How then can we be sure that Iranian operatives are not today smuggling people, drugs, or weapons into the U.S. through our porous borders? The number of illegal aliens other than Mexicans or OTMs being apprehended by CBP agents has grown over the last several years, and we do not currently possess a concrete mechanism for determining how many OTMs evade apprehension and successfully enter the country illegally.

Since September 11, 2001, DHS has also reported an increase in arrests along the Texas/Mexico border of illegal aliens from “special interest” countries. However, it is not just our Southern border that we need to watch. According to a July 2012 report by the Canada Border Services Agency, “Iran is the number one source country of improperly documented migrants who make refugee claims in Canada.” However, it is from countries in Latin America that many of these Iranians are traveling to Canada to make their refugee claims.

Further, there have been numerous reports of individuals with fraudulent passports and other false documentation traveling freely within Latin America and the Caribbean due to lacking border security measures. According to Dr. Matthew Levitt’s statement for the record, Israeli intelligence has found that the use of such false documentation by Hezbollah operatives is widespread, and false passport documents are “used by the organization’s activities in their travels all over the world.” The U.S. and our neighbors should be working vigorously to close these loopholes.

We have also already seen Iranian penetration within U.S. borders. Several Hezbollah supporters have been arrested in the U.S. after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. A Hezbollah cell was discovered in 2002 in Charlotte, North Carolina. The New York City Police Department has caught Iranian IRGC operatives serving at the Iranian Mission to the United Nations conducting pre-operational terror surveillance of potential targets including the New York subway. Only two years ago, the DEA foiled an Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. in Washington, DC. In May, the Iranian-American involved in this plot was sentenced to 25 years in prison for his role.

In conclusion, we cannot reject the notion that Iran may be planning more attacks in this hemisphere – within U.S. borders – in the near future. We cannot downplay the threat from Iranians seeking to exploit refugee and border security loopholes. We need leadership, a strong border security plan, and closer ties to our neighbors because we all face repercussions if Iran should mobilize its operatives around the region.

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